

~~SECRET~~
MCN-DE

D R A F T/Dr. Ellsberg/jh/10-2-64

SUBJECT: Draft Cable to Saigon on alleged expectation of US pull out

In valuable set of talks here Sullivan has reported widespread and strengthening belief among South Vietnamese officials and groups of likelihood of US intent to reduce commitment to SVN or even pull out shortly after November elections. ^{your report on Khanh's suspicions seems along same lines.} Would appreciate detailed comments

from you on factors and events apparently contributing to this belief; on the form this belief may take and its relative strength in specific

^(individuals and groups) groups, such as Khanh, Minh, important Army officers and potential coup leaders, members of High National Council, Buddhist and catholic leaders; ^{and VC cadres;} and ^{possible} effects of such expectation upon official and political behavior of these individuals and groups and upon their likely interpretations of US actions in coming month.

Report raises many urgent questions. Recognize that answers must be speculative, but indispensable to have your judgment on these matters in framing immediate actions and declarations here. Conclusive refutation can only be the fact of continuing US presence and support after November, but if unfounded fear of US withdrawal persists till then it could have disastrous effects on likelihood of viable government emerging from High National Council or on the composition and orientation of such a government. Moreover, it could demoralize government performance in interim and encourage efforts both of VC and of ^{neutralist} factions aspiring to power.

Assuming situation as Sullivan describes, basic question is, what can US ^{best} do between now and November to counter this dangerous and unfounded belief? Presume that acts more than words are needed, but what words would help? By whom, to whom, what form and channels?

What specific actions here and in theater would be ~~most~~ effective in convincing significant officials and groups that US is committed to maintain support so long as needed and that current actions and programs in support of this commitment have no relationship to elections? Are different actions and messages along these lines required for different Vietnamese audiences?

How would specific acts now under consideration -- such as MAROPS, DeSoto, cross-border air ^(retaliatory air strikes against DRV) and ground operations, -- be interpreted by ^{in SVN} VC/DRV and by various groups in context of belief that US intended to withdraw in near future? Would there be strong tendency in some quarters to discount these acts as evidence of US long-term commitment on grounds that actions are oriented to elections? Is such interpretation, in your judgment, likely to reduce effectiveness of such actions as signal of US commitment either to GVN, South Vietnamese, VC or DRV? How can we protect the effectiveness of these and other actions against such perverse interpretations? In particular, what would be most convincing on this score to the VC and the DRV?